

## **Come What May by Lborealis**

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**Summary:**

Just a little drabble inside of El's mind as she rides home from Chicago to save the boy who'd saved her.

For MilevenWeek over on Tumblr - prompt: long distance

Happy Stranger Things Day!

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### Author's Note:

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Happy Stranger Things Day!

El's foot tapped impatiently against the steel bar of the seat ahead of her. It was cold through her well worn shoe, hard and immovable in a way that felt just like the situation.

She had no control. No control over what she had seen. No control over his screams. No control over the terrors that she didn't quite yet know the face of, but that she knew for a fact were wreaking havoc on the people she loved.

Loved.

Love:

noun: strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties”

She had looked it up on day 295.

Mike had said it.

Well, almost.

“El.. I love... nevermind...”

His brow had suddenly furrowed and he'd paused, his lip trembling

and his eyes glassy in one of his ‘bad’ days that hurt her the most. He dropped his head upon the receiving end of his supercomm then and fell silent. She tried to reach for him despite knowing that it was not an option, and his eyes popped open in surprise. El’s heart jumped into her throat as his gaze cut straight through her before he faded into mist.

In the hours that followed, El had stared at her dictionary. It was a well worn book that had become one of her most constant companions in the endless days within the cabin walls. El had stared at the words on the page for hours, piecing out what exactly ‘love’ could possibly mean to him.

It wasn’t the first time she’d heard the word, of course. It was theme baked heavily into the stories on her soaps. But the way that Mike had said it... it sounded different. Not a grand dramatic proclamation like the people on the TV. But instead soft. Hesitant. Fragile.

It just didn’t quite make sense.

So she’d done the only thing she could think to do:

“What’s love?” she’d asked over a TV dinner of off grey meat and mushy corn the following evening.

Hopper looked up in the surprise, the word seeming to affect him in a way that she hadn’t expected.

“It’s uh...” he stuttered as he took a swig of his beer to pause his thought, “Gotta admit, kid. That’s a hard one to explain. Did you look it up in the dictionary?”

“Didn’t help,” she replied simply.

“Okay...” he said as he speared his meat and began to cut, “It’s a feeling, I guess. Like you can’t live without something. Or someone. It’s like they’re more important to you than you are to yourself.”

*More important to you than you are to yourself.*

El bit her lip as her breath caught in her throat.

*Love.*

She felt it, with the word now firmly attached, on day 296.

The word echoed like a question through her mind as his lips slowly said her name. He sat cross legged beneath the tiny fort he'd made her that night, his mood lighter than it had seemed in days. She felt the word become real like a spark through her body when he smiled that night. He seemed embarrassed, as he did sometimes, shaking his head in the most adorable way as he spoke to her through his radio. And then, fresh and named and finally known, she'd let herself drown in it as he spent forty-five minutes, one of the longest calls of all time, doing nothing more than explaining the rules of new game he'd gotten, the instruction manual laid out on his lap as he taught himself the game while also teaching her. Telling her how much he'd like to try it with her, all the while.

Her bloody nose had entered the second nostril that night, but she wouldn't have had it any other way.

In the days that followed she felt love for him it in a million other ways. It had flashed and risen, crashed and spread. It had taken her over with a life of its own.

*Love.*

And then, on Day 354, she felt it the hardest of all, as it turned from a blooming rose to a shard of ice.

And she felt it now, as the bus engine turned on and began to back out of its spot in the depot, pointed for home.

It was a different now, no longer a knife, no longer a comfort.

But something more.

It was tempered. Questioned. Broken and rebuilt. It now held one new, heavy, and affirming truth.

It shocked her as she watched the city slip away.

It did not matter to her the disappointment that had crushed her in

half. It did not matter to her that he had not called in days. It did not matter to her that he had looked at that other girl in the way that El had felt was so incredibly special just to her. It did not matter if he had moved on at all.

It only mattered that she loved him.

Mike Wheeler had served as her north star from the first day she had escaped into a terrifying new world. His kind eyes and soft voice, and his willingness to believe her despite her lack of words had given her a comfort she only knew, in hindsight, was so incredibly rare. He had been her first salve against loneliness. Her first companion in as long as she could remember. The first person to look at her as though she was easy to understand, just another person, just like him. Even more, the first person to look at her like she was special, precious, something more than a weirdo experiment liability escaped from a lab.

And even though all she'd had during those hundreds of days was his voice and his washed out face in the grey of the void, it was enough. Just enough. Enough to string her along and pave the road to the next day and the next day and the next, in hope of a better tomorrow.

He had given that to her.

He'd saved her, day by day, behind those wooden walls. His beacon of hope burning deep in her chest in a way that she never could have lit herself.

It was biggest gift she had ever been given in her life.

And no matter what came next, she knew one thing. In this one moment. In this one night. He did not need to light her way. This time, she could light his.

Requited or unrequited.

Come what may.

**Author's Note:**

Thanks for reading! If you want more Mileven I have a ton over on my profile ;) Come hang out with me on Tumblr at [@dancingskygreen!](https://dancingskygreen.tumblr.com)